

Visiting Artists
piano duo
Elizabeth and Marcel Bergmann
piano duo
Sandre and Jereon Van Veen

Wednesday, February 16, 2005 at 8:00 pm



Arts Building
University of Alberta

Program



DEPARTMENT OF
MUSIC

Program

Canto Ostinato (1976) Simeon ten Holt, composer

Performers	piano duo	Elizabeth and Marcel Bergmann
	piano duo	Sandre and Jereon Van Veen

PREFACE, *Canto Ostinato*

The first performance of *CANTO OSTINATO* took place on April 25th 1979 in the Ruïnekerk in Bergen (Holland) and was realized using three pianos and an electronic organ.

Other combinations are possible using keyboard-instruments. *CANTO* can also be considered as a solo piece (keyboard two hands) with or without electronic resources.

CANTO stems from a traditional source, is tonal and makes use of functional harmony, it is built according to the laws of cause and effect (tension-release). Although all parts of *CANTO* have their fixed position in its progress and are not interchangeable without violating the melodic line, the internal logic and form, beginning and end do not have absolute meaning as boundaries, of form.

Time plays an important role in *CANTO*. Although most bars or sections feature repeat signs and although the performer(s) decide(s) on the number of repeats, one cannot speak of repetition-as-such. Repetition in this case has as its goal to create a situation in which the musical object affirms its independence and can search for its most favorable position with respect to the light thrown on it, becoming transparent. Time becomes the space in which the musical object floats.

The performers have a wide margin of contribution. They decide about dynamic contrast, duration (in detail as well as for the whole) about the use of opposing or non-opposing timbre-differentiations, whether or not to play passages in unison. Also about repetition and combination of bars and sections, depending on their place within the score.

The performers also decide, depending on available time and physical effort, whether they will take turns or if there will be a pause. At the first performance, which took about two hours, a pause was held at number 88 in the score, a pause in which a prerecorded tape was played of the first sections (A, B and C) following number 88. The concert was resumed after 25 minutes (tape fade-out). A performance of *CANTO* is more like a ritual than a concert. The piece is not in a hurry and has in common with so called minimal music that one cannot speak of fixed duration. As stated the first performance lasted two hours but it could have easily been more or less.

The main part of CANTO is indicated by the bracketed systems in bolder type. For the right hand there are two systems on which alternatives (variants) have been notated. Likewise there is one alternative stave for the left hand. Supposing that the piece is performed by just one musician (e.g. a pianist), then he can diverge from the basic part via the given alternatives in order to create variety. Apart from these alternatives each bar or section of the basic part itself has the possibility for variation: by displacement of accents and dynamic contrasts. Some suggestions for these are given in the score by thinly drawn stems connecting notes within each group.

A new episode begins at figure 88 in the score, a sort of interlude. Bars and sections are indicated now by letters (A,B,C, etc. to I). This episode and the transposed section from figure 91 consists of a number of sections which are more or less small commentaries on the basic structure A.

Through its constant return A forms a pivotal or rest point. The ordering of A and its satellite-sections as given in the score are, in a certain sense, relative.

The symbol (\longleftrightarrow) indicates that in many cases one can either go back or forward in one's choice of sections and that, depending on the harmonies, certain sections can be combined. The variants notated as footnotes from figure 88 (for the left hand) function as a sort of 'wandering' part. They do not have to be present all the time - they can disappear and return - and they need not be filed to the notated octave-register.

Piano Duo Elizabeth and Marcel Bergmann

Elizabeth and Marcel Bergmann have been performing together as a duo since 1989. They studied with Arie Vardi at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Hannover and with Jean-Eudes Vaillancourt at the Université de Montréal.

The duo received first prize at the *International Chamber Music Competition* in Caltanissetta, Italy, and were laureates of the *4th Murray Dranoff International Two Piano Competition*



In 1993 they became members of the young artists' roster of *Yehudi Menuhin-Live Music Now*. Their recitals and concerts with orchestra have taken them to many parts of the world, including the USA, Italy, Germany, Holland, Greece and Canada. The duo has appeared at the celebrated *Gilmore International Keyboard Festival*, the *Banff Arts Festival*, the *Royal Bank Calgary International Organ Festival and Competition*, the *International Two Piano Symposium* and *Schubertiade*, Miami, the *Tage für neue Musik*, Darmstadt, the *Braunschweiger Kammermusik Podium* and at the *EXPO 2000*, Hannover.

They have made recordings for the CBC, for several stations of the ARD in Germany and for National Public Radio in the USA. In 1997 they recorded their first CD with 20th century works for two pianos. The duo's most recent recording appears on the *Arkto*s label featuring works by Rachmaninov, Bernstein and Debussy. As founding members of the *International Piano Quartet* they had the opportunity to record Stravinsky's *Les Noces* under the direction of Robert Craft at the Abbey Road Studios in London. The CD first appeared on *Koch International Classics* and has been recently re-released on *Naxos*.

Currently on faculty at *The Mount Royal College Conservatory* in Calgary, Elizabeth and Marcel have also been involved in various musical activities at *The Banff Centre for the Arts* in recent years. They are members of the Calgary based group *Land's End Chamber Ensemble* and have recently appeared as soloists with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and the Red Deer and Lethbridge Symphonic Orchestras. Their extensive repertoire ranges from the baroque to the contemporary and includes numerous own arrangements and compositions.



Piano Duo Sandra & Jeroen Van Veen

Sandra (1968) and Jeroen van Veen (1969) met each other at the piano while studying at the conservatory in Utrecht in 1987. In 1989 they married, and since 1995 they play together the piano. Their debut was a concert with *Canto Ostinato* for two pianos by the Dutch "minimalist" Simeon ten Holt. The concert was live recorded and the Cd was sold in more than 40 countries worldwide. After this many concerts and CD's followed. At first they played other music from Ten Holt like *Horizon* and *Incantation IV*, nowadays they play various kinds of music like the *Carmina Burana* by Orff,

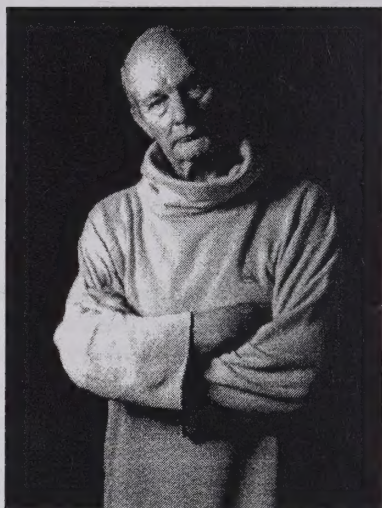
The *Planets* by Holst and the *Rhapsody in Blue* by Gershwin. Together with two friends they also form an Art group, with whom they make theatre concerts based on different themes, for example a "Composers Life" or the "History Of The Piano". Concerts and recitals brought Sandra and Jeroen van Veen from Miami to Novosibirsk, in Russia. They are initiators of many concert series, among them the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Lek Art Festival in Culemborg, and the International Students Piano Competition in Utrecht. They recorded many Cds in the last ten years. For 2005 they will record the complete Multiple Piano Works by Simeon ten Holt, which will fill eleven Cds and will be released on Brilliant Classics. Sandra and Jeroen van Veen are both founders from the Simeon ten Holt Foundation. Besides playing piano they teach over a hundred students, privately at home and at the University of Utrecht.

www.vanveenproductions.com

www.pianoduo.org

Simeon ten Holt

Composer Simeon ten Holt was born in Bergen (in the Dutch province of North Holland) in 1923, as the son of painter Henri F. ten Holt (1884). Together with Nico Schuyt (1922-1992), among others, he studied piano and theory with the Bergen composer Jakob van Domselaer (1890-1960). Jakob van Domselaer's influence is initially considerable, as shows from his first compositions for piano (Kompositie I-IV, Suite and Sonate). He later joins a group of artists including Friso ten Holt, Gerrit Kouwenaar, Constant Nieuwenhuis and the young poet Jaap van Domselaer. They discuss art and philosophy.



In 1949 Ten Holt moves to France, where he remains for a number of years, taking lessons from Honegger and Milhaud at the Ecole Normale in Paris. In 1954 Ten Holt resettles in Bergen, this time taking up residence in a converted World War II bunker. It is here that he writes the important piano composition *Bagatellen* (1954). In reaction to the tonal influence of his teacher Van Domselaer Ten Holt develops his own method to come to terms with the concepts of tonality and atonality. He calls it the diagonal idea, the simultaneous use of complementary keys in a tritone relationship. This results in the compositions *Diagonaalsuite* (1957), *Diagonaalsonate* (1959) and *Diagonaalmuziek* (1956-1958). Ten Holt's social engagement, his philosophical state of mind and his literary qualities show from a number of articles on music he published in the literary magazine *Raster* between 1968 and 1973. In 1968 he founds the *Werkgroep Bergen Hedendaagse Muziek* [Working Group Contemporary Music Bergen] which still exists. For this working group he organizes concerts solely devoted to contemporary music, initially at the Arts Centre in Bergen, later at the *Ruïnekerk* [Ruin Church]. Ten Holt is also active as a pianist, performing his own works.

At the 1969 Holland Festival his percussion piece *Tripticon* (1956) is performed. At the Institute for Sonology in Utrecht and in his own home studio he works at some electronic compositions (*Inferno I and II*, *I Am Sylvia but somebody else*). During this period he is also a regular visitor to the Warsaw Autumn Festival and has contacts in New York. Ten Holt taught contemporary music at the Academy for the Visual Arts in Arnhem from 1970-1987. Here he experimented with group improvisations that, in latter years, led to performances at Arnhem Festivals. (A form of total theatre in which the students under his charge were responsible for music, choreography and dramaturgy.) A breakthrough is the performance of *..A/.TA-LON* by the Asko Ensemble at the 1978 Holland Festival. In 1979 his composition *Canto ostinato* (1976-1979) for four keyboards is premiered. In 1985 this work is performed at the Gala of Dutch Music at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, giving Ten Holt national exposure. During the eighties Ten Holt's music is frequently performed, not only in concert halls, but often in a wide variety of places, such as the concourses of railway stations, parks and squares. Muziekcentrum Vredenburg in

Utrecht plays an important role in the promotion of Ten Holt's music by organising concert series devoted to his evening-long compositions for keyboards. Various compact discs were recorded during these concerts.

Ten Holt's considerable oeuvre can be divided into periods.

During the first period Ten Holt shapes his musical identity by struggling out of the influence of his teacher van Domselaer. The two works for piano *Bagatellen* and *Cyclus aan de waanzin* [Cycle to Madness] (1961-1962) are typical of this process. This is what Ten Holt has to say about the tonal and expressive *Bagatellen*: 'A renaissance stage of life finds its expression in the *Bagatellen* in a style that can be situated somewhere between Chopin, Bartók and Janáček the late works of Van Domselaer.' By means of his own system of composing, the diagonal method, Ten Holt abandons tonality and finds his own way in the *Cyclus aan de waanzin* (1961-1961). ('The tonal element drifts like a shadow through the *Cyclus* and presents, sometimes openly, sometimes in disguise, the bill of an unpaid debt.') The second period covers music which is construed according to various theoretical principles in which the tonal material is determined by serialism. The important composition *..A/.TA-LON*, dated 1966-1968, occupies itself with the relationship between language and music. In *Interpolations* for piano, from 1968, Ten Holt uses an aleatory composing technique. In the *Five Pieces* (1970-1972) the computer influences the compositional result. And finally Ten Holt writes a number of electronic compositions. ('The aspect of so-called emotionality, exaggerated into an almost idolized institution, the certificate of sensitivity, evangelized as the bearer of the "message" is returned (not denied) to its rightful and democratic place, subservient as an equal partner in the realization process.')

In the present and third period Ten Holt has returned to the instrument with which his life as a composer started: the piano. He himself speaks of a strong physical relationship to the sound of the instrument. This is what he writes: 'My hands grasp at what my mind cannot "grasp": I believe in my hands (...) Because of them I am in the dark, grasping at a reality which I (being the embodiment) only experience as a nebula, as a sensation.' This results in the major composition of this period, *Canto ostinato* for keyboards, from 1976-1979. It took shape as a work in progress at the piano. The score is laid out as a route for the performers to take, using the so-called 'drift parts' at will. The number of players is undetermined, as is the total length and the number of repetitions of the various sections on which the composition is built. The freedom left to the performers gives them a great responsibility towards the final result.

In these compositions, that border on repetitive music, Ten Holt develops his own unmistakable style in which tonality and repetition evoke a new sort of aesthetics ('tonality after the death of tonality'). Characteristic compositions in this style, besides *Canto ostinato*, are *Lemniscaat* (1983), *Horizon* (1985), *Incantatie IV* (1990) and *Soloduveldans* [Solo Devil's Dance] II (1986) and III (1990). With *Palimpsest* (1993) Ten Holt seems to be taking a new direction. After an exclusive devotion to the piano for years he wrote this composition for seven strings.

The Composer speaking:

- My compositions take shape without any predetermined plan and are, as it were, the reflection of a quest for an unknown goal. A great deal of time, patience and discipline are the prerequisites for making a (genetic) code productive, that eventually determines form, structure, length, instrumentation etc. Such a process is laborious, as the perception of this generating code is constantly being troubled by human short-comings and one's own will, and it is dependent on moments of clarity and vitality. And then, the sea washes and polishes, time crystallizes.

- The only advantage of ageing may be that a development can be viewed in retrospect. And that, in spite of the zigzag movements and the apparently opposing directions, one is able to discern a logic in this development that hitherto had a function that was hidden and blocked from view. A road then seems to appear, which is oriented towards a goal shrouded in mystery, momentarily hardly gains in height and only advances in the curves. In this image the curves refer to so many turning points, not only as changes in the perception of the landscape, but mainly as changes with regards to the attitude to life and a revision of the conditions to pursue the road any further. The curves are like the articulation in a pattern of movement, end and beginning from one phase to another, and appear to coincide with biological periodicity, with intervals from seven to ten years. As far as I can see, my relationship, both figuratively and practically speaking, to the tonal centre and the problem of tonality, has been a determining factor in the development of the achievements in my creative career. This relation gradually shifted from an initial intuitive understanding to a more conscious issue later on. The role of the tonal centre, first as an undisputed factor, starts to move, loses its authority, submerges into chromaticism and the equality of all tones, and finally emerges in a shape that is chastened by death and katharsis. A large-scale history reproduces itself on a small scale.

- I was very surprised to find myself in a steppe-like landscape one day, which was characterized by an immense horizon, by vastness, space and time, and, last but not least: by tonal centres and tonality (Canto ostinato). In spite of various speculations I have not been able to find an adequate explanation for this development yet and, just like before, I have no idea of the next port to which my compass is set.

Simeon ten Holt
Bergen, June 1995

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